



Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

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[North Atlantic / Iceland / Scandinavia / Polar] Gemeine Beschreibung aller Mitnachtigen Lander/ alsz Schweden / Gothen / Norwegien / Denmark &c.

Stock#: 86155
Map Maker: Munster
Date: 1579 circa
Place: Basle
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG
Size: 14.25 x 12.5 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

The Top of the World, from an Influential Geographic Text

Fine, early regional map of Scandinavia, Iceland, the Baltic, the North Sea and the North Atlantic regions. It was first issued in the 1579 German edition of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*, one of the most influential geographical works of the sixteenth century.

The *Cosmographia* first appeared in 1540 and was subsequently reprinted in many editions. Over time, some of the original woodcuts needed to be replaced. This is the third, and final map of Scandinavia included in the *Cosmographia*. It was added by Sebastian Petri, the son of the original publisher of the work, and it is an early derivative of Abraham Ortelius' 1573 map of the North Sea.

The map shows a large area, stretching from Russia and Northern Europe, through Scandinavia, to the British Isles, Iceland, and the northeast of North America. Land seems to cluster around the North Pole, but waterways north of Russia and North America suggest a navigable Northwest Passage, although the body of water near Russia is called the Frozen Sea.

Greenland is shown much smaller than its actual size, surrounded by many other islands. Some of those islands are fanciful. These include Frisland, near Iceland. Further west, Estotiland is shown as a part of North America. The latter, like Frisland, originated from the apocryphal fourteenth-century Venetian



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voyage by the brothers Zeno.

Other mythical features abound, including the islands of St. Brendan, Brazil, and Groclandt. Frisland, with Estotilandt, St. Brendan, and Brazil will be discussed below. Groclandt was supposedly an island west of Greenland. Mercator included the feature on his 1569 world map and it was picked up by other cartographers from there and repeated until the early seventeenth century.

The *Cosmographia* was hugely popular in addition to being influential for contemporary cartographers like Mercator and Ortelius. It was published in at least 35 editions by 1628; these editions included examples in German, Latin, French, Italian, English, and Czech.

Münster was widely traveled himself, but he also gathered sources for the work from ancient and more modern sources. These included Herodotus, Strabo, and Titius Livius, as well as Marcantonio Sabellico, Beatus Rhenanus, and Aegidius Tschudi. He additionally collected reports from recent travelers, which he integrated into his descriptions. These descriptions included detailed overviews of the customs, dress, and organization of peoples around the world, earning him a prominent place in the histories of geography and anthropology.

Mythical islands of the North Atlantic

The North Atlantic is especially prone to mythical or elusive islands, a result of the rich seafaring cultures that border it and the intensity of the expansion and commercial trade of European empires in the Atlantic World.

Perhaps the most famous of the Atlantic mythical islands is Frisland, near Iceland, whose fascinating story and association with the Zeno Map is told elsewhere. Hy Brasil is an enduring Atlantic chimera emerging from Celtic folklore. It ranges on maps from just off the west coast of Ireland to the area around the Azores. The island was initially described as a rich paradise not unlike Atlantis; it emerged from the depths for a short period and then would disappear. It started to appear on portolan charts in the fourteenth century and continued to be a stalwart of maps and charts into the nineteenth century. The island was the subject of a fanciful pamphlet by Richard Head in 1675. Despite no accurate reports of its whereabouts, the island appeared on Admiralty charts and other reputable maps for centuries, usually in the latitude of 51°N and at a longitude of 17°W.

Another island of note is that of St. Brendan. Like Hy Brasil, this island is also connected to Irish lore. St. Brendan, hearing of a promised land from St. Barrind, decided to take a group of monks to find the paradise in the sixth century. After 43 days the monks landed on a deserted island. This is only the first of



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a series of islands which they encounter, before facing a frozen sea. They have more adventures and eventually return home. The island itself initially appeared near the Canary Islands, but by 1570 Abraham Ortelius placed it near Newfoundland, where it stayed until slowly disappearing from maps in the seventeenth century.

Detailed Condition: